

Interview with Allen C. Davis

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ALLEN C. DAVIS

Interviewed by: Peter Moffat

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[Note: This interview has not been edited by Ambassador Davis.]

Q: This is an interview June 26, 1998 with the Honorable Allen C. Davis. Mr. Ambassador, can you tell us a little about your early life and how you came to join the foreign service?

DAVIS: Peter, I grew up in the middle of Tennessee on a farm. I think one of the reasons I joined the navy very early on while I was still in high school was that I wanted to see something besides Tennessee and learn more about the world and other peoples and other countries and that kind of thing. Well, we'll see how that's going.

My assignments in the navy took me to Bermuda first and then later on to the Mediterranean. My squadron was assigned to Port Lyautey in Morocco, now called Kenitra. I got a chance to travel fairly extensively in southern Europe, in the Mediterranean and North Africa. It was during that time that I really became aware of the foreign service and what foreign service people do. While I was an undergraduate preparing for my navy assignment as an aviator. I had not known what I wanted to do after I left the navy if indeed I decided not to make that a career. The time in the navy gave me contact with the foreign service and I liked what I saw, so I left the navy in 1953, came to George Washington University and then Georgetown University to work on a degree in foreign

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affairs. When I finished studying at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, a job was waiting for me at the State Department, so I went to work in 1956.

Q: You came in in 1956. You were our introduction to the foreign service - the first actual live officer we saw on arrival. That must have meant that you were quickly assigned to personnel affairs.

DAVIS: Yes, the office which processed employment papers and reviewed documents on the examination and the investigation of background and all that needed a person to help them. I guess there were several of us. There was Jim Curran. Am I going to be able to remember some of the others? There was Walter Ramsey later on. We were also eventually assigned to that office, so we did have the task of organizing the class, telephoning people, making arrangements for them to travel to Washington, arranging a ceremony to swear in the new officers, and asking an endless list of questions because people coming from all over the country to join these junior foreign service classes were usually not very familiar with Washington or with how the State Department operated. So it was a fun and interesting job.

Q: *What did they do with you after that?*

DAVIS: After about a year and a half working in personnel in the employment division, I was assigned to the Foreign Service Institute to do the basic training: learning the various functions of the foreign service officers in that time in the late '50s and also to get oriented for the geographic areas to which we were assigned. Mine was going to be Africa, and I knew that. Also to polish a language if we didn't have the language already under control. I had started in French so I did several months of French training before going out to my assignment. It seemed a little bit of a nonsense at the time because I was being assigned to an English-speaking post and studying French for it. The result was not all that ridiculous because there was a contingent of Haitians working in Liberia where I was

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assigned, so I was able to use the French I had studied just before leaving Liberia in late 1958.

Q: Can you situate what was going on in Liberia at that time for us?

DAVIS: It was indeed. Liberia was very firmly under the control of the Americo- Liberians who ruled almost every facet of life. Politically, of course, it was a kind of oligarchy with the Americo-Liberians virtually refusing to let the native peoples participate in political life. Economic life was quite similar. The good jobs and the good lands were reserved for the Americo-Liberians. Socially, in almost every way, the grip of the Americo-Liberians was firm and unrelenting. People who were returning from school in the United States at the time to become the future leaders of Liberia were such people as Cecil Dennis, who I think was the foreign minister when the Americo-Liberians regime eventually was overthrown. That was the group with which I primarily associated. They loved parties, they loved social events - usually late night dancing parties. I got to know some of them fairly well. They were a little bit younger than I was, but not all that much. I was the consular officer at the embassy for the first year and a half and then the political officer for the final year that I was there. For me, the time is memorable in a kind of sad way. This group of Dennises, Simpsons, Parkers - first family offspring, really - were the ones who were slaughtered - some of them tied to posts on the beach and machine-gunned when the native Liberians eventually took charge of their country.

Q: Were you aware of the depth of feeling which eventually burst ouor was this hard to what subsequently happened...

DAVIS: Not difficult to imagine, Peter, but I think there's a kind of natural tendency to gravitate to the people with whom you are going to be associated with day in and day out in government in whatever social events are taking place and all the rest. Anybody who thought for very many moments about this deep schism would have to imagine also that eventually the eruption would take place. The fire that would burn this five percent

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of the population which had been so unrelenting and had shown no indication that they were going to share the power and the wealth of the country with the great majority of the population.

But did I have enough opportunity to associate with the Krahn and the Gio and the others in the countryside? No. I traveled some, but they were not politicized. They had not been allowed to become politicized. Their resentment was obvious to anybody who thought five minutes about it. But experiencing it was not something that happened in daily life, so the hope I guess that I had at the time was that something could eventually evolve rather than a cataclysm. I think it's the kind of feeling we had about South Africa. How is this going to change? Is it going to come about gradually and is there going to be a possibility for the two sides to work together afterward? I guess that's really the secret hope we had at the time, that it could be something that wouldn't have to be a bloodbath.

Q: But the United States Embassy must have had some sort of pro-consular role in trying to influence the Americo-Liberians to be more forthcoming to their countrymen or was it strictly day to day...

DAVIS: Peter, this was a long time ago, and I'm trying right now to remember any single instance in which Ambassador Jones ever did such a thing. I can't recall a single instance. Now, we had a long series of kind of semi-professional diplomats in the top job at the embassy, and when I arrived there, there was an ambassador who was new to his job but had been in Liberia as AID director. Richard Jones was his name. He was, I guess, a retired or general in the army reserve and had come out to be AID director. He was not the kind of person who would have originated any such initiative. He would not have been terribly reliable had he been asked to pursue any such initiatives. Now, when he left in 1959, the department assigned a career diplomat for the first time. You will remember his name. I cannot for the moment. He later became ambassador to Nigeria.

Q: *Matthews?*

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DAVIS: Yes. Albert Matthews, who had been, I think, a deputy assistant secretary of state. A very distinguished, very polished, very accomplished man in many ways. And he was the kind of person with an intellectual bent - just a tremendously impressive diplomat who would have been the kind of person to do exactly what you are suggesting. I left the post soon after he arrived, so he was still kind of settling into his job. Whether he did, I can't say. It certainly was not a main kind of a theme of our assignment by any stretch of the imagination.

Much of the embassy's work at the time was economic. An extremely rich iron ore deposit had been discovered years earlier on the edges of Mount Nimba which is where Liberia, Guinea, and Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), where their frontiers come together. A company named Lamco was organized, a railroad was built across the country. Iron ore was already being brought out of some other places where the mining was taking place in Liberia even before this big deposit could be developed. Of course, we had the long, long-standing relationship with Liberia through Firestone's plantations which grew of rubber. Goodrich had had some rubber-growing plantations also, so our work was really oriented toward those economic aspects.

Q: Well, when May 1960 rolled around, you got sent back to Washington, I understand.

DAVIS: Yes, I had been asked if I would take one of the so-called "hard" languages, and I had chosen Arabic. Before I could get back to Washington, that assignment was changed and I was asked to study Hindi. I came back to Washington and got started at the Foreign Service Institute. Then the kind of Urdu was chosen for me, so just about the time I was getting ready for further study of the language and assignment to Pakistan, the medical division decided that some health problems that had developed in Liberia - particularly amoeba - would suggest that I stay around Washington for a full recovery. And so I was assigned to the brand new Bureau of African Affairs. It had recently been split off from European Affairs. Joseph Satterthwaite had been chosen, I believe, as the first Assistant Secretary for Africa and then we had the Kennedy election. G. Mennen

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Williams was brought in. So I worked at the Bureau of African Affairs in those early years. It was a fascinating time. The aspect of it that I remember most vividly was the parade of diplomats arriving from the newly independent countries to open embassies - literally to open diplomatic relations - as the winds of independence blew in West Africa. So a lot of our time in those years was spent helping them to find places to live, find places to open an embassy, an office building, look after their families, find food that they were comfortable eating, learning about Washington, learning about the Department of State. It was a kind of heady time for a junior officer like myself. Because we spent a great deal of time with rather senior African diplomats, some of them with even less experience than I had but titles much more exalted. In addition to that, they were very grateful and very responsive to any efforts we made to help them, so it was a tremendously enjoyable time.

Q: Wasn't it also occasionally marred by racial slights of varioukinds? Was that the period of the U.S. Route 40 incidents?

DAVIS: Oh, there were dozens of those almost on a daily basis, particularly if someone were the least bit revolutionary-minded. He would very soon after his arrival from the African capital to open the office here, would go out on the road and see what excitement he could generate. Sometimes it took them to the southern part of the country and it was absolutely inevitable that there would be conflict and unpleasantness. Some of the incidents were enormously amusing. Many of them were not. They were very sad and ugly events.

One of the more memorable events was one which involved the new Cameroonian ambassador whose last name was Entheppe. He had been Cameroon's first ambassador to Germany and then came to Washington to represent the Republic of Cameroon. He engaged a fence-building company to put a chain-link fence not only around his chancery out on 16th street, but also around a very elegant house he purchased on Rock Creek Park not too far from the present mosque - over on the other side of the park from the mosque.

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First of all, there was a wonderful conflict with his neighbors, who protested his building this chain-link fence - I think in both places the neighbors complained - but when the fan really got hit was when Entheppe got the bill for the chain-link fence, already with his nerves rubbed raw by the conflict with the neighbors. He wasn't prepared for a vastly, in his judgement, over-priced fencing job, so when he received this, he telephoned the contractor and said, "This is excessive. I'm not going to pay it." The contractor said, "Well, of course you are. If you don't, I'll bring suit." He said "You can't bring suit, I'm a diplomat."

We had in the Department of State at that time an Office of Protocol, which was run by a man named Pedro San Juan. And so eventually it got in to that office. In other words, the contractor came to the Department of State and said he must pay his bills. This was something on the order of \$4 or 5,000 by today's standards. Not all that outrageous. But maybe at that time it was a considerable amount of money for a fence. In a new African diplomat's judgement, this was a good deal of money. To make a long story short, the ambassador, somewhat hot-headed by comparison even with his colleagues, took a pistol and went to the office of the contractor and aimed the pistol at the contractor sitting behind his desk and said, "I want my check." The contractor gave him the check, wisely I suppose, and Entheppe went back to his office with it. Then the fencing contractor very promptly reported it to the Office of Protocol.

There ensued the most outrageous hullabaloo. The press, probably informed by the contractor, came to the Bureau of African Affairs. Ambassador Don Dumont was then the director of Central African Affairs. I vividly recall the session with the reporter from The New York Times, who wanted to run the story the next day. But Donald Dumont dissuaded him in one of the most impressive presentations I think I've ever seen a diplomat make, but the diplomacy in this case was with our press. Behind the scenes, Don was also working with The New York Times to persuade the Times that this is not really in your interest, in the American government's interest, certainly not in the African government's interest to emphasize that this kind of thing can take place. Please hold off on it and if

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you have to publish it because someone else is going to beat you to the scoop, then we understand that, but if you can possibly cooperate with us, we'd like to find a solution. We eventually got the government of Cameroon to recall the ambassador. Not immediately, but to promise that eventually they would let him be assigned somewhere else, which eventually happened. And the story then was allowed - much, much later - to trickle out rather than become a front-page, ugly indictment of a new African diplomat who simply didn't know how to behave in such a marvelous place as Washington.

Q: Well, I think a lot of us knew "Soapy" Williams and the thrust he gave to African affairs. Were you able to form a judgement as to how effective it was?

DAVIS: In many ways, he was highly effective, because Williams had considerable personal warmth. He was a very gracious, polite, humane person. He depended rather heavily on personal diplomacy and an enormous amount of travel. He identified with Africans, and they with him. One of my favorite stories about him, Peter, is that very early on the Nigerian government gave him a wonderful voluminous Nigerian cloak embroidered in beautiful colors...pastels of some kind. He kept this hanging on the back of his bathroom door in that suite up there on the sixth floor?...Seventh floor?

Q: *Sixth, I would think.*

DAVIS: And when Africans would come to the Department to pay a ceremonial visit - like a special visitor coming to work with the Embassy - Soapy would take the cloak, put it on, and go down to the C Street entrance wearing this wonderful, huge, damask cloak that the French speaking Africans called "Bubus." For the life of me I don't know what the Nigerians call them.

Governor Harriman, who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, as you may recall, had a checkered cab that he used for his limousine. He arrived at the C Street entrance one day in his checkered cab when Soapy was standing at the entrance in this enormous cloak. Soapy was an enormous man. Governor Harriman did a double-take and said

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“Good God, Soapy, It's you!” I mention that because it was rather typical of the kind of thing that Governor Williams would do to establish a relationship with the Africans.

Q: Many have spoken of the difficult relationship that the European Bureau had with both AF and what was then called FE...as the newly independent countries broke free from colonialism. Did you see signs of this in AF?

DAVIS: I remember that it used to occur to me in the early '60s that working in the Department of State was not all that different from a form of colonialism because we very often had a feeling that whatever we recommended out of the Bureau of African Affairs was overseen and second-guessed and very often played down by the Bureau of European Affairs in a way that was just not acceptable to us. It was a strange kind of mirror-image of the relationship between Europe and Africa and their governments. So it was quaint and, looking back, rather ridiculous. But it was very definitely a fact of life in our daily work at the Department.

Q: When these differences rose to the top of the Department, was EUR always able to exert this sway, or did you have some victories at the level of secretary or under secretary?

DAVIS: In the very early part of that first half of the 60's, when I was in the Bureau of African Affairs, it seemed to me that it was almost a drumbeat of the upper echelons of the Department overruling the Bureau of Africa Affairs in favor of the Bureau of European Affairs. And then I had the good fortunate...or at least this is the way it happened: in '63, I moved to the Bureau of European Affairs and got to see it from the other side. I think one of the reasons for being asked to move to Western European Affairs was that we had several issues that really involved both Europe and Africa in a way that it made sense to have some people that had experience in the others. I remember there was a man named Lee...I don't remember his first name...who had been in European Affairs and was working in African Affairs. I was moved to the Belgian desk and we were, during that

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phase, wondering how to deal with the uprising in what was then the Congo, later Zaire. So my experience in African Affairs possibly was useful in WE. At any rate, during my stay at the Belgian Desk, the famous Stanleyville parachute drop where the United States helped to deliver the Belgian paratroopers took place. That's an example of the kind of thing on which we cooperated.

Q: You say Belgian Desk, but you were also on the Dutch Desk anLuxembourg Desk.

DAVIS: Yes, there were times when the three were handled together, and then there were times when Belgium and Luxembourg were handled as a unit and the Netherlands was separate. And quite honestly, I don't remember in what sequence.

Q: But my recollection is that WE, as it was called then, was the glamour office of the glamour bureau at the Department. A highly prized assignment. Am I correct?

DAVIS: Absolutely. And was an office in the Department through which aspiring officers really wanted to go, have experience, but particularly have it in their dossier that they had worked in that bureau. The percentage of people who had jobs as director and deputy director of Western European Affairs and later had very responsible and high- profile assignments was very high.

Q: ...The theatrics of the famous parachute drop?

DAVIS: I recall that on the evening the drop was to take place my curiosity - and also sense of duty - took me to the command center. As the evening wore on and we waited anxiously to know whether indeed the paratroopers had been dropped, whether the hostages had been liberated, how many people had been hurt - or worse killed - in the exercise, Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State came by the Operations Center. He had been to some kind of party or dinner and was wearing his tuxedo. The security person for Africa also came by. He had been to the same party and was similarly dressed. I'm almost certain that Governor Williams showed up as well. But it was that kind of an atmosphere.

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There was great tension. There was a very high possibility for a very tragic and politically very damaging outcome. Our consul was among the hostages who had been brought to the town square. I think the hostages had been brought there with the intention of either just holding them there or just shooting them down just as the paratroopers arrived. When the firing started, a number of hostages were wounded and killed. But our consul, Michael Hoyt, made it over a fence or got behind some kind of a wall and was not wounded.

Q: But EUR had other fish to fry besides just African Affairs. Do you recall other highlights of your two years there?

DAVIS: Surely the dominant theme of the time was trying to deal with General DeGaulle and his efforts to establish what he called "Europe de Patrie." Our Assistant Secretary, William Tyler, was philosophically, personally, and otherwise very much the same kind of person as the Dutch ambassador, Herman Von Royan. So, meeting after meeting, after hour after hour of conversations took place between those two trying to dream up original and effective ways of countering the efforts of DeGaulle, particularly efforts that would have either excluded us or shouldered us aside from participating in European Affairs. Von Royan was very, very well versed in American Affairs and had spent a good deal of time here. I think both of those people - Tyler and Von Royan - had roots in both America and Europe, so vacations for most of their lives had been spent on both sides of the ocean. To say goodbye to Von Royan, the Assistant Secretary Dell Tyler gave a dinner party at Blair House, and for this dinner party - a very, very small affair - Dean Acheson was invited, Dean Rusk was there, Von Royan, Tyler, and Malloy, the director of West African Affairs and myself.

Q: Western European Affairs...

DAVIS: Western European Affairs, I'm sorry. Thank you, Peter. misspoke.

Q: Was it a cheery affair?

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DAVIS: It was like a family occasion. They were all so much in tune with each other that something needed to be done - but what? - to counter DeGaulle. But how do you counter DeGaulle! In 1961 I was chosen to do a political office job in our office in Moscow, drawing on my little experience in Africa and several years of experience in the Bureau of African Affairs. I asked if I might be able to study Russian and go to Moscow and do the so-called Africa job in the political section. When that was approved, I studied Russian for ten months at the Foreign Service Institute and went in the early fall of 1966 to Moscow.

Q: As one who studied Russian for 11 months, I'd be interested in your reaction whether this is a sufficient amount of language training to enable you to operate effectively in Russia.

DAVIS: This kind of thing is quite imperative. In other words, it's relative. There were five of us in the class. There were some very gifted people. I was more in the middle or lower range of the group of five in that I don't have a particular gift for studying languages. Bill Brown did and Bill Diaz, who is a fairly accomplished language student. I'm trying to remember who else was studying with us, but...after the ten months, I was acutely aware that I would not be able to read rapidly and with full comprehension in Russian, and that turned out to be the case. I was at a disadvantage in that not only was I weaker in the language, but virtually all other people assigned to Moscow having anything to do with political or economic work were Sovietologists. They had studied for years in university and done graduate work and who knows what, so that they really knew the Soviet Union and its culture and its language extremely well. So it was a little bit of a complex thing. Having said that, with really hard work and a lot of anguish and struggle, I made it through the two years. In practical terms, how did I function with the language? I functioned reasonably well when I was away from Moscow. During a two year assignment - this is almost unbelievable - I think there are 15 republics and I went to 14 of them. The only one I didn't visit was what we then called Turkmani.

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Q: Afghanistan?

DAVIS: And I even scheduled a visit to go there. So during that kind of traveling, I could function reasonably well. Really, sometimes perfectly okay. In hotels, in restaurants, in casual conversations with people I'd meet in the airports and train stations and elsewhere, but reading - I was always at a disadvantage. Consequently, I had to rely rather largely on English-language translations of the materials dealing with Soviet-African affairs.

Q: But were you essentially dealing with the large African student population or were you following the Soviet policy vis-a-vis Africa. What exactly were you up to?

DAVIS: There wasn't enough dealing with the student population to take up a majority of the time. I lived in a neighborhood not far from the university and I did see a lot of students. But the students had more contact with the cultural division than they did with me. And if they turned out to have some kind of commentary or point of view or conflict or what have you that got into the political area, yes, they came by to see me. And I saw a lot of them. But by no means the number that came in and did research in the cultural and public affairs section. I traveled a lot with the people who did the publications procurement and that's how I got to go to so many of the capitals and out into the provinces. I never got to see that part of the Russian Republic that forms the part from Moscow Eastward. So I never got out into Siberia or that region, but otherwise I got a pretty good feel for the whole country. We had a very enlightened political counselor who thought people like myself - not Sovietologists - really would profit a lot from going out and accompanying the publications procurement officer. A lot of my time there was spent working to get better acquainted with what was happening with the arts. A lot of this was personal. It had nothing to do with assignments from the office, from the political section of the embassy, but it was very useful to those people who were working on theater, visual arts, on the Samistat, the publications, to have a window through other people. So consequently I spent a lot of evenings and weekends and holidays - my family with families of artists. We went to art exhibits, we went to homes to look at the work they were doing, we heard

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their comments on the kinds of pressures being applied to them by the Soviet authorities. These for the most part were non-members of the Academy of Artists, so they were outlaw or people on the fringes. Intimidated and harassed by the KGB and the authorities.

Q: So this was a two-year tour?

DAVIS: From '66 through '68. A two year tour. 24 months.

Q: It seems about time for you to return to Africa.

DAVIS: From Moscow, my assignment was to Upper Volta. At Ouagadougou, we had a very small embassy. The ambassador was a college professor from Columbia University. Elliott Skinner had done graduate studies and I guess his doctoral dissertation had been on the Moray language of Upper Volta. I worked for him as political officer and as his deputy, although we didn't use the title of deputy chief of mission at the small embassies. A delightful assignment in a very, very difficult place. It was very gratifying in personal terms. We had three very small children and it was a safe and comfortable and pleasant place for them. The house was comfortable and the possibility of getting people to help you with the children and all of that on the personal side made it quite gratifying. I loved the assignment. Not very much that I can recall that is significant about what was going on in Upper Volta at the time.

I guess one of the most delightful things that happened and which kind of throws some light on the mentality of the wonderful Voltans: there was only one radio station and no television at the time being run by the government in Upper Volta. And to kind of show you how the newly independent Africans sometimes found humor in really quite official circumstances and events. My ambassador was away. He was traveling in the Southern part of the country and I was in charge of the embassy - I think it was the only time I was in charge of an embassy. In the morning newscast, the radio announcer said that at ten o'clock all members of the diplomatic corps - I think there were a total of five of us, maybe six - were asked to be at the airport at ten o'clock for a visit de scale, a kind of technical

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stop by Sekou Toure, the president of Guinea. I hadn't really focused that intently on what the day was or what the date was, but I quickly finished shaving. And not being able to wait for the driver to pick me up, I actually drove the official car to the airport to make sure I was there to represent the United States when Sekou Toure got off the airplane.

But as I arrived, there was a little clutch of people out in front of the airport. But there was nowhere near the contingent of police standing at every corner and making a big fuss. The Soviet ambassador, with a really perplexed look, came over to the car and said "What's going on?" With him was the man who was later the foreign minister of Upper Volta after the government changed. He said "You know what day it is?" and I said "No." He said "It's the first of April." So then the Soviet ambassador, with this strange look, said in Russian, "Schtowet?" and I said, "Well, I don't think you have this in the Soviet Union, but in the United States we have April's Fool's jokes and the French expression is Poisson d'Avril - He said "Well, what does it mean?" And so I said, in a few words, what April's Fool's jokes are. He said in Russian, "In our country, we don't do this kind of thing." I said, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador, we know. I've been in your country and it's true, you don't, but it's something that some other people have a lot of fun doing." Later on, I talked with the Minister of Information, and it was obvious that he was the guilty one. He had actually set this up. For me, it was a marvelous commentary on what it was like to work in Africa at the time. The very thought of having such an announcement go out in Washington and having the gridlock and the confusion and all the rest! In Africa this could happen, and it was a little inconvenience, but the inconvenience was immensely outweighed by the fun and lightness that had gone into it, the good humor.

Q: Who was the strong man in Upper Volta at the time? You spoke of change of government.

DAVIS: Yes, Lamizana, the head of the army, had overthrown the first president, Yameogo, and was running the country really rather well. It was rather easy to get along with him and they made every effort to make the United States feel welcome and

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comfortable there, with one exception. Near the end of my stay, there was one of the recurring famines that required that we provide help to them. We had a struggle with Lamizana about how much control they would allow us to keep over the foodstuffs to prevent them being used for political purposes and worse - to be used for something to sell and then the money to be used for individuals or for the government. So shortly after we got that squared away, I guess we came out of it without too many hard feelings. The new ambassador was named. I happened to be charge at the time the argument occurred. The new ambassador, William Schaufele came out and was able to kind of take over without having to do this under a cloud of bad feeling.

Q: A good service. Where were you next assigned?

DAVIS: Initially, I was asked to go to South Africa as Public Affairs officer, but I asked whether that was the only opening. The Department said, "Well, there is the possibility to go to Algiers, our interest section in the Swiss Embassy since we don't have full relations with Algeria That post needs a political officer, number two." So I went there and worked with Bill Eagleton. We flew the Swiss flag. While we were in practice, part of the Swiss Embassy, we were considerably bigger than the Swiss Embassy. We were quite remote from it, and we circulated very little of what we did through the embassy. The mission was run largely like an embassy and relationships with Algerians were surprisingly good behind the scenes. We had pretty good contacts with the foreign ministry but these were not all that direct. We went through an Algerian businessman who was a personal friend of Boumedienne, the president of the country at the time. A man named Rasheed de Gazaar, who was the next door neighbor to the chief of the interest section, Bill Eagleton. It was a strange, anomalous arrangement which...

Q: At the same time, I was the political officer in Berne, Switzerland. We would occasionally try to have some connection with what was going on down in Algiers, but we quickly learned that Bill Eagleton ran a very independent operation and didn't want us to know anything about what was going on.

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DAVIS: Bill, up until then and maybe afterward, made a very interesting career of being assigned to difficult, difficult places. I guess at various times he was our chief of interest sections in Tripoli, and Baghdad, and maybe even another one. His philosophy was that once you take the initiative and if people don't complain, press on with it. He also had very, very good relationship with the Bureau of North African and Middle Eastern Affairs. Very effectively, I thought.

Q: What were the big issues at the time?

DAVIS: If there was one overriding one, Peter, it was how do we go about normalizing our relationship. Flying the American flag from our mission. In other words, how do we get away from this situation in which before the rest of the world we don't have diplomatic relations.

Q: The relations had been broken because of the '67 war?

DAVIS: Yes. And the continuing tension over the American relationship with Israel. We had particularly interesting things happening on the economic side. If there were initiatives that eclipsed others in that field, they were attempts to work with the Algerians to complete private commercial relationships between the Algerian government and American companies for the liquefaction and transport of natural gas.

Q: It was Boston, wasn't it?

DAVIS: Boston was one of the main centers through which it would have been transported, but there were some others - some secondary ones. Boston, I think, was the primary one yes.

Q: And that foundered at that time.

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DAVIS: It never happened. There was an enormous amount of effort and enthusiasm and time spent on the project and a great deal of visiting by prominent people. The head of Standard Oil came to visit us in his private plane, accompanied I think by now-Senator John Glenn, and quite possibly others who were quite prominent - working to make the thing happen. It did not happen while I was there and quite frankly after I left I kind of lost touch with what had happened. But my impression was that it never really came anywhere near the scope and importance that we envisioned in those years.

Q: How did you find the personal relations with the prominent Algerians?

DAVIS: Algerians were a kind of a phenomenon in that if you knew them personally and if you had something in common. They couldn't have been more cooperative and easier to get along with. For example, there was one foreign ministry official who had studied in this country and had been very, very active in student politics in America, particularly student politics of foreigners - especially Africans and Arabs. Officially, it was a tough, tough place to work. While this didn't happen while I was there, I think it throws a pretty good light on the attitudes and behavior, particularly, of Algerians.

The person who was foreign minister while I was there was Bouteflika. Bouteflika had a well-deserved reputation for being extremely prickly and difficult and quick-witted and tricky. Certainly, in his relationships with us. I believe the ambassador's name was Jernegan, who was there before Eagleton and maybe once removed before Eagleton ... I can't be sure because Bouteflika was foreign minister for a very long time.

Jernegan went to the foreign ministry and during the course of the meeting with Bouteflika, Jernegan was told something that was so patently absurd that Jernegan, whose French I can't judge because I never heard him speak it or know anybody who could evaluate it. I think he spoke pretty good French. He said in French what I guess literally translated in English would be "Mr. Foreign Minister, you can't be serious." I guess would be literally how we would say it. But anyway, he said to Bouteflika "Vous n'êtes pas sérieux [French:

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You can't be serious.]" And Bouteflika, who spoke very, very good English, must have known - could not have been misled - must have known that what he meant was "You're probably kidding me a little bit, Mr. Foreign Minister?" But Bouteflika took that to mean "You're a clown, or you're not a serious person." And so he asked our ambassador to leave his office, and when he got back to his office at the chancery, Ambassador Jernegan was requested to come back to the foreign ministry and to apologize to Bouteflika for saying "But Mr. Foreign Minister, Vous n'êtes pas sérieux." So I think that sort of puts in a nutshell what was going on between us both during Jernegan's time and Eagleton's time.

We had to be extremely, extremely careful. We were always walking on eggs officially. But behind the scenes we were spending long evenings in Rasheed Zegar's house being fed and wine and entertained with dancers, musicians, and the most elaborate kind of, I guess, Arab hospitality - Maghrebian hospitality. We'd get a chance to travel to neighboring countries. It was so dramatic a comparison to see the gentle nature of Moroccans and the wonderful hospitality of the Tunisians and then you'd come back across the border after having been... I'm back home again in Algeria with all these prickly, difficult people, which in some ways was understandable because of their traumatic experience with the French. Their attitudes toward foreigners and Europeans were negative, partially because of their non-aligned movement membership in which Algeria was so active. Attitudes toward the West, colonialism, and the United States were poor.

Q: Have you been surprised by the horrors of the present situation in Algeria?

DAVIS: Surprised in that, when I was there, Islamic extremism was not that much of an issue. In other words, it was beginning and we could see what the ramifications of it might eventually be, but the intensity and the horror of it hadn't really developed. Now, having said that, it was obvious at the time I was there that when the Algerians disagreed with each other - the degree with which they would mistreat and hurt and kill each other was limitless. One of the people we knew fairly well was a freedom fighter who was trying to carry a bomb up the steps of the post office during the time of the French. The bomb went

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off and blew off both of her legs. So in daily life you were in touch with people who had done the most incredible acts of cruelty and horror during the struggle with the French. So the fact that this can be happening now has its roots at least that far back - and probably further - in the struggles between the Berbers and the Islamic people who came from the East.

Near the end of my stay in Algeria, after so much effort had gone into both the economic relationship and the political relationships, Bill Eagleton was convinced that not only was it time for us to re-establish relationships but he was convinced also from what the Algerians were telling him behind the scenes and through his confidant of Boumedienne - that we could finally reestablish full diplomatic relations. Ambassador Newsom was rumored to be the American choice for the new ambassador. The Algerians had given us indications that he was acceptable. He left Washington on an official trip, and included Algeria. I'm a little bit wobbly on the exact timing here, but between the time he left Washington and arrived in Algiers, a very prominent anti-Israeli activist - I think we would have called him a terrorist and I think the Algerians and the Arab world would have simply called him a patriot - was assassinated and the finger of accusation aimed at the Israelis.

As I recall it, we didn't weigh in quite heavily enough in condemning the assassination to please the Algerians. Newsom arrived and there was a session at the foreign ministry. Eagleton and Newsom went to this meeting, and when they arrived back at the residence, they both just shook their heads. They didn't say anything. But the effort to re-establish relations had just been thwarted by the assassination.

Q: So when did you leave Algiers?

DAVIS: It must have been in the summer of '73 that the Department first of all asked me if I would go to New York to work with Bill Schaufele at the mission to the United Nations as African person in the political section. I was appalled at the idea of living in New York and trying to educate three little kids. Let's face it, I didn't have the independent income or the

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kind of savings that made me comfortable going into such a high-octane surrounding. So I begged off and the Department gave me as a second choice an assignment to the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

I started in the fall of '73 and stayed there until late the next spring in early '74. Easily the most comfortable, pleasant year that anyone could imagine. I think there were something like 225 colonels and lieutenant colonels or people of the same rank from some other services. There were 10 civilians. I represented the Department of State as our only person there, and was treated with enormous hospitality, kindness, and with a great deal of professional and personal friendship. It was a delightful year.

Q: What were you thrown into at that point?

DAVIS: After the Army War College, with a little bit of lobbying on my part, I got an assignment as deputy chief of mission at Dakar, Senegal. Our ambassador there had worked at USIA and in the Department of State in some of the same kinds of things I had been doing earlier on. So it was a delightful opportunity for me to work with Rudy Agree. That started in the fall of '74 and lasted for 3 years.

Q: I think Senegal for us conjures up images of a near-Parisian life on the coast of Africa. It's certainly one dominated by relations with France. Did you find that the U.S. had any room for maneuver in Senegal?

DAVIS: Certainly we were always conscious of the dominance of France and the overarching importance of the relationship there between Senegal and France. But about two or three things stand out when I look back on those 3 years, '74 to '77. One, the cultural relationship was pretty strong, and President Senghor was such a respected - and many ways admired - international person that it was important to have a good relationship with him. We did. As a matter of fact, one of the members of our mission was teaching him English, was reading American and English literature to him on a regular basis - by that I mean one or more times a week. Relationships both official, unofficial, and personal were

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extremely good. Occasionally we ran afoul of the French. The most dramatic incident for me occurred about two thirds of the way through my three-year assignment. Ambassador Agree had gone home to Washington for consultations and I was in charge of a pretty good-sized mission. I enjoyed it a lot because we had a really competent and devoted staff. One night a little before midnight I got a telephone call from the Department of State saying "There will be a plane leaving Buenos Aires in a few minutes and on board the plane will be one of the principals in the so-called 'French Connection' drug episode/crime celebrated in movies." One particular movie comes to mind. "The Department would like you to inform the Senegalese government that this is going to happen, go to the airport, ask that someone go with you there, have the police alerted. In fact, have the police arrest this man and have the government hold him until we can have him extradited to this country - to the United States - to stand trial." Well, imagine. This is in the middle of the night.

The relationship with the people in the foreign ministry was such that here's what happened: First of all, I called the foreign ministry with no hope whatsoever of finding anybody there and discovered that the number two man of their foreign ministry, a man named Francois Bob who had been at the presidency in charge of youth and youth affairs - was in his office. I said, "What do we do?" He said "Let me call the person in charge of political affairs and he will go with you to the airport." Imagine. In the middle of the night. We went to the airport, we met the airplane, an Air France plane, the man in question was a French national - and as it happened, after spending a great deal of time both looking in the airplane and the airport, it was obvious that he was not there. The Department had not told me that he didn't get on the plane. In fact, he hadn't. So, all came to naught that time. The cooperation could not have been more complete, more cordial, more forthcoming - really unbelievably positive.

Several days went by and nothing else had happened except that the day following this episode we got from the Department of State a message explaining that although the man had the ticket and the reservation, he never showed up for the flight, so he didn't

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travel. This was a once a week flight from Buenos Aires through Dakar to Paris, or maybe it stopped in Marseilles on the way. I think the man was originally Corsican. Dominique Orsini was his name. The time of the next flight was approaching. The Department had not been able to provide us with anything else, so on the afternoon of the day of the flight, I took the precaution of calling once again and talking with the undersecretary of the foreign ministry involved and said "In case the Department notifies us that the man is on the flight this time, could we now make arrangements during the daytime for this so that we don't have to bother you in the middle of the night - and the fact that you most surely will not be in your office again in the middle of the night." He said "Yes, We'll do it the same way. I'll alert the police, the political counselor of the foreign ministry will be out there to meet you." We did that, went to the airport, the man was on the plane with his wife and a small child, he came into the airport, the police very quietly surrounded him as he came out of the men's room, and hustled him away quietly. I rushed back to the embassy and sent a message - maybe telephoned - to say "They've got him!"

And then began the most extraordinary tug of war. The French, where his statute of limitations for things he was accused of doing in France, including murder, had run out. He was no longer wanted under French law, but the French went through an incredibly elaborate charade of opposing what we had done and called it "piracy" and "kidnaping." You have no idea how elaborate this was. And my relationships with the French Embassy, especially with the counselor with whom I had been on good terms all along, were shattered. He became so cool and so difficult during this whole episode that it was extremely unpleasant for me.

Anyway, back to Dominique Orsini. While he was incarcerated, things became very difficult to deal with and Ambassador Agree still hadn't returned from Washington so finally such pressures were put on the Senegalese government - and we were hearing this as kind of back channel - the foreign ministry was keeping me informed about what was happening. The judge seized with the case and going on the premise that maybe the Senegalese government was not on firm grounds to have taken someone in the international section

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of the airport - he, in a kind of a ruse, decided he would have a hearing - Dominique Orsini would appear before him, he would release Dominique Orsini or Dominique Orsini would walk out of the door of the courthouse or the court room. Then the police would say, "Now you are on Senegalese soil" and arrest him. Which is what they did.

They put him back in jail and informed me that on the next Pan Am flight to Washington they would like to see Dominique Orsini extradited. Now we didn't have an extradition treaty, but the Senegalese were so responsible and attached so much importance to their international reputation - and this was typical of Senghorians in so many ways - in doing what they felt was the honorable thing - that they asked me to arrange - on very short notice - to have him taken out on - I believe it was a Monday evening when the Pan Am flight came through (these flights were always very late in the evening or in the middle of the night or early the next morning).

In order to make sure that I wouldn't have to make decisions far above my capacity, I asked the Department if they would send someone to give me a hand. We were kind of short-handed - vacation time and what have you. A man from the office of Sheldon Vance, who was then in charge of Drugs and Terrorism or something similar. He was deputy assistant secretary level from that office - flew to Dakar on I believe a Friday to be there to help make decisions. For example, one of the decisions that had to be made: the Senegalese would say "What can you do if we turn him over to you on Saturday morning? Can you hold him in the Chancery?" Hold him in the Chancery?! We didn't even have marines at the time. So rather than risk his getting away, Vance sent out this deputy assistant secretary, a very accomplished lawyer, and we passed a very, very tense Saturday and Sunday. It was only on Saturday afternoon that we learned we didn't have to take custody of him. On Monday evening, we went to the airport. Just imagine this scene: at the airport was the French consul, with whom I had had a very good professional and quite satisfactory personal relationship until now - as hostile as you can imagine because we were doing something which he felt his government could not condone. The wife of Dominique Orsini was there, who had flown down from Paris with a lawyer. They were

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being forced to stay behind a glass barrier. The deputy assistant secretary and I were taken through with the police and the man from the foreign ministry accompanying us.

When time came to fill the airplane with passengers, this paddy wagon came swerving out onto the apron and from the rear of this paddy wagon was an explosion of people, including this bull-like character who had been arrested. While he had been in prison, he had tried to cut his wrists and had managed to wound himself a little bit. They put a lot of bandages on and he had pulled the bandages loose. So as he came out the back of the paddy wagon, these bloody bandages were flying. And from the airport waiting room are shouts of "Kidnappers!" And he is saying, "Assassin!" Unbelievable pandemonium. Finally they got him under control enough to get him up the steps of the airplane. He was a big, strong fellow. They turned him over to the two FBI - no - who would they be - who was sent here with the deputy assistant secretary?

Q: DS? Diplomatic Security?

DAVIS: No. Not diplomatic security. They probably were from the Bureau of the Treasury. But anyway, they were agents. And they got handcuffed to him and got him into the plane and sat down with him. But he still made so much of a ruckus that the crew of the plane refused to take off. He was in first class and the other passengers were protesting. They said they weren't going to ride on an airplane with all this going on. So then the pilots came back and fortunately, fortunately, this deputy assistant secretary—a professional lawyer who had years of experience - was there. He says that the crew has asked that he be sedated. I said "As far as I'm concerned, he can be sedated, but am I the person?" He said "Yes, you are the one who has to make the decision." I said to...why can't I remember the deputy assistant secretary's name? Anyway, he said "Sedate him." "How?" Then we had to call the Peace Corps doctor, who came with, I think, Valium and injected him with Valium. He calmed down enough so that the last view any of us had of him, he was sitting and sipping champagne between the two agents and the deputy assistant secretary who then accompanied him back to Washington.

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He was tried about a year later. I was home on transfer and I was asked to appear at the trial. During the trial, the main thing I was asked to testify on was whether I gave permission or asked that someone sedate him. I said, "Yes I did. I asked the Peace Corps doctor to come and do it - with the advice of the State Department's representative, who was there." And that turned out to be not so much of an issue - in the decisions - but it was clear that the defense - Dominique Orsini's defense - was trying to make it a major issue. Orsini was assassinated in jail less than a year later, and his defense lawyer was assassinated on the streets of New York during the immediate months after that. It was a very tense time for me and the family and I particularly remember that when we traveled both to New York and when we stopped in Philadelphia during those trips - that before we would go to sleep at night we would push furniture against the hotel doors to help to at least alert us if something were going to happen in the night. I guess it's one of the scariest times we had until we later were in Uganda, where there was a constant threat of physical harm.

Q: Did the French continue to protest diplomatically and otherwise after his departure?

DAVIS: After he departed, the embassy never lodged official protest with us, but there were kind of publicity campaigns that were instigated in France and I think L'Observateur had several commentary articles that took us to task for using high-handed tactics and bypassing the traditional niceties and grabbing this guy, sedating him, and taking him away. Now, I'll tell you kind of the bottom line in the French attitude. After it was all over, and my relationship with the counselor got rebuilt a bit, he would use expressions like "Well, it couldn't have happened to a more appropriate person." So it was obvious they knew very well the kind of character with whom we were dealing. They knew in the long run what some of the beneficial effects could be, but they were very, very loyal to either the individuals or the officials in Paris who weren't going along with this. So they defended the official line to the hilt.

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Q: Good service in Dakar... You got your reward in Kinshasa in 1977.

DAVIS: Yes, I went to Kinshasa in '77 as deputy to Walter Cutler, who was the ambassador in Kinshasa at the time. And there had, if my memory serves me correctly, had been one Shaba war and we were headed toward the second one, which occurred while I was there. In both instances, outsiders had to come in to give a hand. The Moroccans were the main ones who helped Mobutu stay in power. The situation in Kinshasa was difficult at the time. Zaireans suffered really terrible economic conditions - and buying foodstuffs, and getting clothing, and gasoline and cooking oil was very tough for them. There was a great deal of unrest in the population of Kinshasa in particular, and the rest of the country either kind of worked on its own or it didn't work, depending on what was happening in a given location. We had a consulate in Bukavu and a consulate in Lubumbashi, so would visit from time to time. The roads had deteriorated dreadfully, almost all travel had to be by air. Fortunately, we had a military attache plane which could move us around the country to do things that needed to be done to stay in touch with our constituent posts.

Q: The Moroccans provided an element of personal protection, did they not, for Mobutu?

DAVIS: As well as helping to turn back the bands of people who had come into Shaba, primarily from Angola.

Q: Policy in Zaire was a favorite punching bag of critics of our policy of supporting Mobutu. Did this play out in any sort of tensions in the embassy? Or was everyone happy with our policy?

DAVIS: Far from it. The great divergence of opinion even between the political counselor and the ambassador eventually became so intense that the political counselor had no choice but to find something else to do elsewhere. I believe he may have retired.

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Q: Who was that?

DAVIS: His name, I believe, was Remole. I believe his first name was Bob, and Bob took a position similar to a number of people in our Congress and elsewhere in our society that was defensible - that Mobutu was such a dreadful dictator and so corrupt and so greedy that he did not deserve our support. Bob's position, however, went to a degree where I couldn't follow him. It was that whoever we got to replace Mobutu, whether it were by chance or we had a role in installing his replacement, he couldn't be worse than Mobutu. And having seen such things as the elevation of Bokassa to a position of responsibility, having seen what happened in Uganda with Idi Amin, it was by no means certain that it was impossible to get worse than Mobutu. So, it was along these lines that several kinds of schisms, ruptures, rifts, were quite obvious in the mission. Mobutu's performance during that period was very difficult to defend.

For example, there was a minor attempt to overthrow him - one of many, of course. But I think there were 8 or 10 people executed on the grounds of the executive mansion when they caught them and given a kangaroo trial. After the executions they were burned in a fire there. Moreover, Mobutu was grabbing so much of the country's resources that I recall that on one rather dramatic occasion he made a reach too deep into the coffers of the Gecamines, the mining company. I was there as charge and was asked to fly to Lubumbashi, where he had moved his office shortly after the second tribal war there. Literally, I think I was flown down there in a Gecamines plane. My role, my instructions, were to go and tell him to stop it and put the money back, which I did. And while I was down there, there was a Gecamines office in the same town, and I went from one office to the other. After I spoke with Mobutu and he absolutely denied doing any such thing. "How could anyone accuse me of such a thing! This is clearly prevarication!" Then I went over a little later in the afternoon and the Gecamines office and they said "It's been put back." That kind of role just seems so ridiculous and laughable.

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Q: That's the other part of the popular criticism of the time of our support of Mobutu - if memory serves me, is that he was a creature of the Central Intelligence Agency, and that the station chief was sort of his master or certainly more influential than the American Embassy. Am I misrecalling or was the Agency beyond such criticism?

DAVIS: Certainly that was alleged. At no time did I ever doubt that we had had a significant role in putting Mobutu where he was and maintaining him there. Because we were afraid of the consequences if he fell: the disorder, the chaos that could occur there in this great big, awkward giant of a country. It was just almost too awful for our policymakers to even contemplate. So very often the instrument of dealing with him was the CIA. And I have no doubt whatsoever, although I was not that much involved in the early years, that the CIA did indeed have a very, very significant role in setting him up and maintaining him in power. But then, the rest of our government, the rest of our institutions here either acquiesced or went along willingly with their doing that. Now when we were there, '77 to '80, when I was there, there was no doubt in anybody's mind that the ties, personal ties, between Mobutu and the station chief were at least as strong and quite probably better than they were with the ambassador. We had the role of criticizing him and asking him to stop doing god-awful things; whereas, the CIA did not. So, we tried to use that relationship as best we could and at the same time hold as tight a rein as possible on the CIA and to require as elaborate reporting as we could possibly get from them on everything that took place in that relationship. But not only was the close relationship between the station chief and Mobutu personally, but there was also in addition, a former station chief who represented a diamond concern. And his relationship was so strong that we needed to use him and we did use him as a channel for getting quickly through to Mobutu and emphasizing to Mobutu how serious certain things were. So, it was a tricky and complicated and sometimes very distasteful kind of a knot that had to be tied and untied.

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Q: Did you find that he was able to view things rationally or did you feel you were you dealing with an essentially irrational...

DAVIS: Mobutu? Powerfully rational, a highly, highly clever person with keen intelligence, almost insatiable greed. He took great delight in playing off French against Belgians against Americans and whoever else might come into the picture. A fabulous politician, brutal as could be, with scruples that were pretty hard to find. Oh, far from irrational. He knew that we needed him. He made us pay dearly for it. And we did pay - dearly, not just in resources, but also in disagreements within our government. Congressman Solarz was bitterly opposed to him. There were people in the Department of State who hated him bitterly and wanted him brought down. There were of course the people in the private sector such as Templesman, who would go to bat for him and do extraordinary things for him. He was easily one of the most difficult of government leaders to defend. And I never had anything to do with it.

Q: This of course was in the Carter administration and one would have thought that perhaps the anti-Mobutu forces would find more sympathy than in some of the other administrations.

DAVIS: I hadn't thought of that. Of course, one of the people who felt very strongly that we had to have stability and order there, and therefore a relationship that was workable with a master of keeping order, Mobutu. That person at the Department of State struck me as being Lannon Walker, who very often would either come in and pay a visit and presumably be convinced that he had gotten Mobutu to agree to do something that we wanted him to do. Walker just felt so strongly that we needed Mobutu.

Q: And what position did Lannon Walker hold at that time?

DAVIS: I think he was a deputy assistant secretary of state. I honestly don't remember for sure. His reasoning was fairly close to my own reasoning at the time. I felt that it had to

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be, for the lack of a better expression, a carrot and stick approach that kept a very tight rein on Mobutu. I was never content really with the stick part of it. I didn't think we hit him hard enough when he needed it, but then you know this was in the time such people as Kissinger were looking at global issues. We had a kind of mind set in those days that - you know, do what you can to make him do the right thing, but if he doesn't, disorder and chaos just aren't something we want.

Q: Were you able to work with the French and the Belgians? Or was it successful in putting everyone at everyone else's throat?

DAVIS: You know, we felt so often under siege, really, in that sea of misery and unhappiness that the population was always exhibiting. There were, for example, such things as a band of people who invaded the home of one of the World Bank or IMF employees and carted off the belongings in the household after they had raped, I think, the daughters. It was just dreadful disorder. So, the diplomatic community did band together a little like you would have found in Moscow. And I was there back in the '60s. So there was a community of interest. Obviously we didn't always agree and the French were constantly trying to horn into things that had been Belgian. They were trying to horn into things that had been our preserve at various times. I remember the French built a very impressive and almost worthless telecommunications installation that involved television broadcasting studios and antennas and things that were almost worthless in that circumstance, but we were told that it was mainly a political gesture that had been backed by the very, very top leadership in France. And so arguments over things like that were the most likely disagreement. We did not disagree fundamentally on the fact that Mobutu was corrupt and inhumane.

Q: Of course you now know that the French really did chase out the Belgians.

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DAVIS: No doubt about it. The writing was on the wall, there. Oh, yes. The enlargement of the Francophone community was coming on. Belgium was getting some hard licks from France in those days.

Q: There was considerable preoccupation, particularly as DCM, with the problems of security?

DAVIS: No doubt about it. I think if I had to put on a piece of paper a list of the things that were top concerns personal security, security of property, particularly the lives and good health of the staff were very near the top. This consumed an awful lot of time and an awful lot of other services.

Q: Was moral high, low, indifferent?

DAVIS: Morale was surprisingly good in Kinshasa in spite of the fears. We had a large American community, a rather tightly knit American community that was pretty much organized around an elaborate community center where there were tennis courts, a swimming pool, lots of evening functions, and a large marine contingent was very much involved in it. So I'd say the community worked rather well together in Kinshasa. The Department was very good in assuring the necessary resources.

Q: You went to beautiful Guinea in 1980. How did this assignment come about?

DAVIS: I got a telephone call in the middle of the night in Kinshasa from Dick Moose, assistant secretary for Africa, asking me if I would be willing to go to Guinea and be the ambassador there. I told him I wasn't at all sure that it was a good idea, that my knowledge and association with Guinea had been such that I wasn't sure I could be the right one to interact with Sekou Toure. I thought of him as a tyrant, a very cruel and inhumane fellow who was far too intolerant of any opposition at all. I told him to give me a few days to think about it. I got out some reading material and rather quickly came to the conclusion that Toure needed us - I hadn't realized that - and wanted to work closely with us. So

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rationalizing and obviously with the chance to be ambassador, it's hard not to take a reasonably positive stance. So I told him I'd try. About three days later I called back and said I'd be glad to give it a try. He kind of confirmed some of the things I just said about Sekou Toure's performance as of late. When I got there, I not only confirmed what I thought was taking place but very soon came to realize that it was almost impossible to do things wrong in the eyes of the government. If they got the impression - and by "they" I mean Toure, because he was an absolute dictator - if there was the slightest impression that you were headed down the wrong path, they'd find the most polite and infinitely helpful way to kind of let you know it and give you a chance to do whatever it was you wanted to do. But preferably to work with you. So there was a wonderful feeling of security, there was a splendid feeling that cooperation was what was desired and for the most part that's exactly what we got while I was there. Toure came to the realization that relying on the Soviet Union was just not all that helpful for them. The mainstay of the economy was - at least any foreign exchange earnings - was the aluminum plant in the north, which of course was basically American. He protected it with great determination and virulence. When there was a choice between doing what the Soviets wanted him to do and what we wanted him to do, we could just always count on his trying to do what we wanted to do. That wasn't always possible, because he was still very much linked to the liberation movement kind of people. He still had a black panther residing there. He paid almost no attention to him. The two-plus years in Conakry were some of the happiest days I ever spent. They were delightful, the climate was wretched, the countryside was not a particularly fascinating one to visit, but even trips out into the country were a total delight. The secret police were always there to help, not to cause trouble for you. At the same time, there was this gnawing, uncomfortable feeling whenever you felt grateful to Sekou Toure for anything, barely two blocks away from my residence there were people being starved to death in prison because they opposed him. And he knew about it, and he condoned it. There was no question in my mind. So working there as ambassador in my day was a kind of double track effort: when human rights report time came around, to say really blunt and almost impossibly hurtful things about Sekou Toure and at the same

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time encourage him to continue along the lines of cooperating with us and to adopt ideas which fit our own about capitalism, economies that were allowed to function more freely. For example, as you may know the Rockefeller family had been kind to Sekou Toure way back when. They have all been so gruff and impossible with them. We kind of revived the David Rockefeller/Sekou Toure friendship. We had a kind of a marvelous visit with David Rockefeller at that Tarrytown Estate Keepwood - complete with flowers. He gave him a dinner around the swimming pool and fireworks afterward with the cream of New York, the UN, State Department, American government, and business community people were at dinner to talk with him. David Rockefeller provided him one of his personal staff to come out and advise him on economic things. He lived there for several months. It was a fascinating time.

Q: There was a perception that Sekou Toure had matured or mellowed from but from what you say, it was only half-

DAVIS: Yes. He was still doing pretty dreadful things, but less blatantly, less openly, with less "Look at me, I'm doing it." Look at the human rights reports from those years and see that we were really harsh in what we said about the prisons, and who he was keeping in them, and how unwilling he was to have a free press. And how unwilling he was to denounce some people like the North Koreans and others who were an anathema to us like the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Q: Perhaps just before your time there Sekou Toure had granted the Soviets aviation and / or submarine transit and fueling rights, which were withdrawn. Is that correct?

DAVIS: My recollection now is sketchy, but I believe the allegations were in the years - just even in the months - before I got there, there had been I think maybe a Soviet sub tender that was allowed to operate in and out of Conakry. Also Conakry had been used as a refueling stop for planes perhaps helping to move Cubans from Havana to Luanda. This is very sketchy and I wouldn't be able to remember. But that was certainly a pattern and in

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our policy guidelines, I remember that was one of the things that we were planning to get the Soviets to stop doing. By the time I got there, he was stopping it, and all of that was being scaled back, scaled down, made far less blatant. And in my judgement, as I recall, made far less effective as assistance to the Soviets and Cubans. Now, I can't remember - certainly Sekou Toure had not broken the relationship with the Cubans, but there was no longer the elaborate exchange of visits and rising to defend the Cubans every time they did something. That, too, was positive.

Q: Beginning in 1983, our relations had continuously improved.

DAVIS: Yes, by the time I left there, that would have been in early 1983. I guess there were probably a good six or seven years of a kind of upturn in our relationship. Of course, I stayed there for about two years and a half. All of the ambassadors before me had something like the stay I did, so it was a kind of continuing process that was quite well started. I left with a great deal of regret. I remember thinking how different my attitude toward Guinea and its government was when I left there than that was in my mind when Moose called me just a few years before that. Strangely enough, although obviously you do what you can to make a process like that improve and go remarkably and all the rest, it has its own dynamic and built-in laws. The needs of Guinea lying mainly in the West, disappointments and failures in the relationship with the Soviets and this just predisposed them to not only continue the process but find ways to refine it and ways get the things they needed. The relationship with France was going really surprisingly well. And we all know how bitter the roots of the disagreement were back in 1958.

Q: In your pantheon of some of the big men of Africa that you studied, how do you rank them in terms of total wickedness among people like Mobutu, Toure, and Idi Amin, Bokassa? Do you find some better than others or were they totally self-seeking?

DAVIS: I don't know. I had a tendency to kind of focus on what's there that's good and useable and what's there that's hateful and should be stopped or slowed if possible. And

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then the ground in between where you look for the aspects of their personality that are useful that you go about your daily business. And with Sekou Toure you could almost count, without exception, on his doing what he said he would do. So he was a man of his word. You couldn't count on him to tell the truth always. You could count on him to be a fabulous kind of manipulator of what was there so that his version of it, as a politician, came across in the most favorable light. But if you asked him whether "A" would get done or "B" would get done, he would very often tell you. And if he had to say no, he would do so in a remarkably acceptable fashion.

It was the underlayer. It was the history of Mobutu, of Sekou Toure. It was what we knew about some of the really gross and unacceptable things that he not only allowed to happen but he probably told the people to do them - like having his people invade the embassy that was the residence of McIlvaine. And hold his wife and kids in absolute terror until somebody could get in there and chase these people out of the embassy back in the early '70s. So, all of that history was there as you dealt with him. So you were faced with holding onto it, remembering it, and keeping in perspective what was later happening when he could be one of the most charming people in the world. His way with an individual - for example, he asked me to come with him on a trip back to Washington. It was the one when the Rockefellers received him. He wanted me to fly in a plane that had been provided for him when we left to go back. He wanted to stop in Morocco. I didn't know at the time. I said yes, but I found myself in the presence of him and the king and all the rest - almost like a personal friend - now a personal friend who has people brutally executed and he holds people in prison until they die of starvation. You know, you'd better have a strong stomach. But when he would go to a village for example and he would take you along and there would be all of this elaborate adulation with the population would be really quite unimaginable. But as for ranking them - kind of putting them on a scale of horrors? Mobutu had some of that same capacity to charm but he was more like an exalted - more like a king - more like an absolute ruler. Toure would occasionally give the impression of being quite democratic. That was something he worked at and Mobutu, no. Surely the

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most corrupt and the greediest was Mobutu. One of the most I guess difficult for me - by far the most difficult for me was the president of Uganda.

Q: Idi Amin?

DAVIS: No. Milton Obote had what I thought were quite admirable motives and directions, particularly dealing with economics. It looked to me that he was less corrupt than the other leaders with whom I had dealt. It looked like he even had a humane side when you dealt with him one on one, but he could not get a handle on the uprising, particularly in the central part of Uganda. His wife was Bagandan, but the awful mistreatment that he visited on the population of the center there, the Baganda, was just unacceptable to us. It should have been unacceptable to anybody. And he let his military people and he let his civilian security sorts, his secret police and others visit the most hideous kind of retribution on them. There were thousands of them wandering around in this kind of wilderness, uprooted from their villages, refugees. This was a kind of central sore point in our relationship.

My point of view was obviously the point of view of my government: that until he could calm this thing, until we could get some kind of calm in the center of the country (so that there could be stability, so that the atrocities that were taking place could be slowed down if not stopped), our ability to send him assistance of any kind - economic, food, relief efforts, and certainly anything approaching military assistance - were marginal.

So here I am, week in and week out, hammering this point home to him. Mobutu was not well. He was drinking too much, he was smoking extremely heavily and he simply was no match for his military and for his security apparatus. It was my impression - and I believe that of most serious observers - that he was not in control. Eventually, he became so angry at this badgering that we visited on him that one of his ministers, the Minister of the Interior, asked me in front of other people at the table, "Is it true that you believe that President Obote is worse than Idi Amin?" Well, I was so stunned and so shocked that he

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asked the question in the first place that I could hardly believe it. My answer to him was "I don't think that's a fair question. Obviously, I don't believe that President Obote should be compared in those terms with an ogre who was a brutal and almost maniacal tyrant. However, until some way can be found to have things settle down in the central part of the country - particularly until the elderly, the sick, the children, the defenseless members of the population can go back to their homes and live some kind of a decent life - you have to say that something is still seriously wrong in the country."

About a day or two later I was invited to see the president. He told me that his minister had come back and reported to him that I had said he was worse than Idi Amin as a president. The interesting thing was that this was happening right at the time that he had infuriated the leader of his own forces, who had gone up to the north and was just sitting there, waiting to pounce. Barely days or weeks later, he did move down from the north and took over the capital. Milton Obote was removed from the country, and I think the minister who carried the tattletale lie back to him - I think he was killed. I don't know. I'm not really sure. But all of this happened just on the eve of my departure. It would have been the summer of '85. It was very sad, because I really had, and continue to have, substantial feelings that Obote wanted good for his country, had a number of things headed in the right direction, was more of a parliamentary democrat than many, many African leaders.

Q: Let's back up just a bit to start Uganda from 1983 when you were assigned as ambassador to Uganda. Can you site this for us in what was going on within Uganda when you arrived?

DAVIS: Uganda had been really dreadfully traumatized and physically very damaged by the Idi Amin years and the fighting that took place when Milton Obote came back from Tanzania with the help of the Tanzanians to be president a second time.

Q: *In what year was that?*

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DAVIS: Wasn't that '79? I think the fighting was in '79. And Gordon Beyer was our first ambassador to him, so I replaced Beyer. Beyer had a pretty good relationship with Obote. He was kind of a champion of Obote and felt that the country was trying, that Obote himself was trying to do a good job and to put down the rebellion as quickly and as humanely as possible, get on with the work of rebuilding the country that had been so damaged and traumatized under Idi Amin. In a way, I guess I went into a situation where Obote felt I should have been at least sympathetic and supportive. It was my impression that the Department did not want that kind of atmosphere in our relationship and was looking to me to kind of hammer Obote to do what needed to be done.

Q: How did he respond to that?

DAVIS: Initially, he was quite friendly and open and I can't remember anything that could be described in any other way in his relationship with us. Over the course of the two years, that changed to a point where it was obvious he considered this kind of pressure on him to be intolerable and to be undermining his regime. As it turns out, that was exactly what it was. It was undermining his regime. He was weakened in the eyes of his population and the eyes of his military and the eyes of his neighbors. The British thought that rather strongly and the British representation there, the high commissioner, obviously felt that we needed to be more sympathetic to him and more helpful to him, which I was trying to do.

Q: With the wisdom of hindsight, do you think there is anything tthat?

DAVIS: Obviously there is something to it because the British high commissioner was a very intelligent man. His government had their own analysis of what was going on, and sure, it was unfortunate and very - what shall I say - ugly for a country, ostensibly an ally - someone who wanted to be helpful - to be damaging to stability. I would have to say in retrospect now that while there probably was a truth somewhere in the middle between what we were trying to do and what we were trying to do. If there was only one thing I did in my foreign service career of which I am truly proud, it was hammering Obote to be

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kinder to the defenseless thousands of people and I am convinced he could have been kinder.

A major theme in almost every conversation I ever had with him would be, "Mr. President, we see what a difficult set of problems you face. We know how difficult it is to rebuild a country after such a regime as that of Idi Amin. But in order for us to help do that, first of all we need to have the facts, we need to have the truth, we need to have a feeling on the part of your government that we are here to help and not to bring you down. When we don't get that it undermines our ability to do it - particularly in the Congress, but with other elements of our government. So, please work with us to get the truth out. Please let us know what we're doing that we ought to stop. Explain it to us why and then tell us what we can do either militarily or in the way of technical assistance that we might offer in advice, but somehow let's establish a relationship where we are working together to do things that I'm convinced we both want."

Upon which, invariably, and very often through a kind of drunken haze, he would absolutely become vehement and say "There is nothing bad going on. There are people who are trying to bring down our government and who do not wish this country well. What you are saying is false." Eventually, I'm not quite sure how we got him to accept it, but there was a young man who was sent in by the Department of State named Bob. He was a specialist on refugees and displaced people. He was the instrument by which we finally got what we thought were hard facts. And they were almost too difficult even for us to accept - the numbers of people that were dying and wandering around. It was absolutely scandalous.

There were several people in the House and also in the Senate in our legislature that came out to have a look. As you know, the church had a way of promoting some of the citizens there - the Church of England, the Catholic church, the Protestant churches other than the Church of Uganda, which was the local equivalent of the Church of England. So you had these tribal schisms, you had the church schisms, you had the regional and

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geographic schisms. The country was an absolute “basket of crabs,” as the French say. Not easy. Not easy. Obote had a great deal of my sympathy. He really did. And lord knows, I tried to work with him. But eventually I found myself really, in spite of myself, working against him.

Q: How did that happen?

DAVIS: As it became more and more difficult for Obote to control his civilian security folks and his military, there was a rupture between Obote and his commanding general. The general just left Kampala and moved to the north, his home territory and kind of bided his time for the better part of, as best I remember, two or three months. Then I was completing my tour, the household goods were packed in boxes - most of it. My wife and my daughter left Kampala for France, and about three days after they departed my two sons were in the residence some distance from the township when suddenly almost without warning, the general and some forty or fifty trucks - that's all it took, but they were full of military personnel - just moved almost without opposition from the north all the way down through the center of the country into Kampala.

The only words that I think adequately describe it are “all hell broke loose” in Kampala with rocket propelled grenades, all kinds of cannon fire, and small arms fire broke out in town while I was in the office, along with the major part of the staff. We were pinned down in the chancery for the better part of - my memory is beginning to be a little shaky on exactly how long - but I think the better part of three or four days.

And during this time, there was a terribly difficult task of staying in touch with those who were in isolated parts at the time. We didn't know how the invaders from the north - not invaders, but the people who had come into the capital from the north - were going to treat foreigners. As it turned out, they were really not focusing their ire on the foreigners at all. They were focusing on the followers of Obote. Anyway, the embassy had had a very, very tough time with its communications systems which linked us back to the Department.

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I had been so obstreperous that I had become very irritating to the Department about this. I didn't know what could be done, but assuming surely there was a technology that could keep us in practical communications. So we were using - for the most part - we were relying very heavily on these little moveable sets like the CIA and the military used. When the invasion of the capital took place, telephone lines were just left - the people in the telephone headquarters just apparently fled and left what was plugged in plugged in and what was unplugged, unplugged.

And as it turns out, one phone set in the embassy had been left plugged in at the switchboard and for the better part of three or four days we had an open line, nobody attending to it whatsoever. And everything was happening on this line between the Department. No telephone, no telegraph connection whatsoever. And we couldn't get to the emergency radio that had been at the house of one of the CIA personnel.

The most dramatic thing for me personally was that my two sons - probably late elementary school and high school age, were at home alone. The residence was right beside one of the strongpoints militarily where there was an anti-aircraft gun. This anti-aircraft gun could be lowered and fired at ground targets, so the military were determined to take it. The house was virtually between the anti-aircraft emplacement and the people who were coming up the hill to take it. So there was a great deal of skirmishing around the residence. We did have hand-held walky-talkies.

In a real stroke of luck, we had a British national who was helping us to finish packing the household goods and nailing them into crates. He happened to be at the house working when the strike hit the capital, so he was there with the kids. What they did was barricade all the doors and windows and then with the thought they were going to get hit by heavy artillery shells, they went into the corridors and took heavy mattresses into the corridors. There were bedrooms on both sides of the corridors so you had a little bit of a cushion, and that's where they spent the entire time without electricity. This all came to a kind of traumatic climax when the British fellow got on the hand-held voice set and said, "The

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forces are bringing up a machine gun - they are setting up a machine gun in front of the house, they are training it on the house and they are asking us to take down the flag. They have asked permission to come and examine what is in the crates. These were the crates of household effects. We told them, "No, this is American territory, and it would not be appropriate. They simply must not come in." And so then there were some North Korean military assistance people there and they seemed to be involved in this little...I don't know what to call it. It was a feint or whether they really meant to fire on the house. He said "And they are now getting down on their stomachs and they are aiming at the house. What do we do?" I said "Yesterday when I met with the colonel who has come in with the forces from the north, I asked him for a telephone number to reach him in case we had this kind of emergency. I will try to reach him."

I hung up and called. Sure enough, I got through to him. I said "There's something dreadful happening at the residence of the American ambassador. There are people in the house, and it looks like there's going to be a firefight either between these people who are setting up a gun emplacement in front of it and the anti-aircraft emplacement. Could you please do something about it?" He said "I'll try." About fifteen minutes later, the British man called back and said "They are picking up the machine gun and they are going back down the hill." It was highly personal, but it also underscored the good luck, I guess, that I had had - either the presence of mind or the good luck the day before to say "But tell me, Colonel, what do we do if an American is about to be set upon and hurt physically or not just injured but killed?" And he had given me his private number. I can't remember - their little strongpoint where we visited them soon after they got to the capital, put out feelers, got back information that they would be glad to receive me. I think they were headquartered in the office of the gendarmerie. That was their command post.

Q: I hope your sons were not totally traumatized by that!

DAVIS: They still talk about it with a great deal of pride. They did see people receiving bullets and falling and bleeding. That part of it was pretty shocking to them. But as best I

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can make out, it also provided wonderful subjects for stories when they got back to their schools. And who knows what all the effects might have been. I think for one thing they had kind of glorified that kind of uprising in their own minds and when they got to see what it was really like with the confusion and the machine-gunning of automobiles, and the ugliness of it, it made quite an impression.

Q: This must have delayed your departure a bit.

DAVIS: It delayed the departure for not very long. I was asked to go to New York and work at the UN with General Walters and his people. Although I asked Jim Bishop if I could stay a little bit longer until things calmed down, he said no, come on out. So maybe my kids were not the traumatized one. Maybe I was.

Q: But you didn't go to the UN, did you?

DAVIS: Yes.

Q: I thought you went to POLAD.

DAVIS: No, I stuck with the UN from mid-'85 until...goodness...I think it was in the winter, probably December or January of '86. I had great fun working with General Walters and with the African delegations.

Q: You must have heard some of the stories several hundred times.

DAVIS: I had heard some of those stories even before going up there when he used to come to the Department - and where else did I hear some of those stories earlier? But yes, the stories were very amusing and I did memorize some of them, yes.

Q: Were you able to influence policy at the UN?

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DAVIS: Oh, I don't think so, unless you can say that by staying in touch with people on a friendly basis. No major influence, I would say. I think Walters himself did. You know, he was far better known, had the stature and all the rest. But I can't say that I personally made any fabulous contribution. I enjoyed it. It was a lot of fun working with him.

Q: You were working solely on African affairs?

DAVIS: Yes. Well, sometimes it kind of spills over into other areas, particularly the subject matter wouldn't be Africa and you would be working with the Africans on various other things. I can't think of any major issues that were there that time around. My first time at the UN in 1962, there had been the Cuban missile crisis and there had been some rather extraordinary things happening.

Q: Then in 1986, you went to Stuttgart. That must have been verpleasant.

DAVIS: There were pleasant aspects of it, but it was not a job I would choose again by any stretch of the imagination. Had I known when I went there what it would be like, I would have said no. The things I liked about it were that I was allowed still to do a lot of African things. The European Command, based at Vinegl outside of Stuttgart, not too long before that had been given responsibility for Africa as a part of their operational area. George Lane had preceded me there.

There was a four-star general who loved the idea that he had senior people surrounding him and he could kind of use that kind of presence to enhance his own prestige and all the rest. The personal rewards, if you want to call them that - the personal satisfaction is a better expression - of working in that setting, were nowhere near those of being in an embassy and doing the work that I had been trained to do and had experience in doing all along.

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Q: Do you have any valedictory comments on this African experience? On what you lived through and could see and put in context for the rest of us?

DAVIS: I suppose, Peter, that I had some regrets that I let myself be beguiled or tempted into having quite so much African experience. Not because I didn't enjoy it and not because it wasn't kind to me. Certainly not because I didn't have the kind of career that I could have expected to have. But because it gave me a somewhat limited capacity to see things in Asian terms or Latin American terms or Pacific terms. In other words, I became almost too specialized. And surely one of the reasons I let that happen was because it was so comfortable and it was so appealing. And the Africans themselves were so seductive in their good humor and their directness, in their willingness to be open and frank with us on things, even where we disagreed. I love Africa, you know, and let myself, because of that, stay where there was always another job opening up just as I finished the one before it, a job which was in Africa or dealing with African affairs.

At one stage, someone told me that I was the person on active duty with the greatest number of years in Africa. It may be true. I don't know. But it was quite a series of assignments that added up to a long list. There are other reasons for it. Very early in my foreign service career - as a matter of fact in my assignment to Liberia - I was convinced that since I probably would not come back for another African assignment when I left there in 1960, that it would be a good idea to get to know Africa a little bit better while I was there. So I sold my '52 Pontiac, I guess it was, and I bought a Land Rover and for the better part of - I guess it was a month and a half - I drove through 14 countries and made a particular effort of visiting every museum or whatever the equivalent at that time might have been - research institutes they sometimes call them. The French had something they called L'Institut Français d'Afrique. The British had similar equivalents. During that time we must have covered about - I'm not sure of the mileage - but a lot of miles were put under the Land Rover. I got acutely interested in African cultures - African art, ethnography,

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material aspects of the culture. Obviously I built on what I learned in 1960 and all the countries after that where I was assigned.

In retirement, I'm finding it one of the more appealing and amusing things to continue. So the professional kind of blended with personal during all of those years associated with Africa and still continues.

End of interview